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you know what I'll do tomorrow? I'll start a cyclone in this town that—

"Goodnight," said Minot, and hung up.

"Who was it?" Harrowby wanted to know.

"Our friend Trimmer, on the warpath," Minot replied. "It seems he's missed his vaudeville partner." He sat down. "See here, Harrowby," he said—it was the first time he had dropped the prefix—"it occurs to me that an unholy lot of things are happening to spoil this wedding. So I'm going to ask you a question."

"Yes."

"Harrowby," Minot looked straight into the weak but noble eyes, "are you on the level?"

"Really—I'm not very expert in your astounding language—"

"Are you straight—honest—do you want to be married yourself?"

"Why, Minot, my dear chap! I've told you a thousand times—I want nothing more—I never shall want anything more."

"All right," said Minot, rising. "Then go to bed and sleep the sleep of the innocent."

"But where are you going? What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to try and do the same."

And as he went out Minot slammed the door on a peer.

STICKING above the knob of the door of 389 he found a telegram. Turning on his lights, he sank wearily down on the bed and tore it open.

In torrents it rained [said the telegram] at the Dowager Duchess's garden party. You know what that means.

It was signed "John Thacker."

"Isn't that a devil of a nightcap?" muttered Minot gloomily.

CHAPTER X. Two Birds of Passage

ON the same busy night when the Lilieth flashed her red signal and Miss Gabrielle Rose arrived with a package of letters that screamed for a Cotrell, two strangers invaded San Marco by means of the eighteen-nineteen freight south. Frayed, fatigued, and famished as they were, it would hardly have been kind to study them as they strolled up San Sebastian-ave, toward the Plaza. But had you been so unkind you would never have guessed that frequently, in various corners of the little round globe, they had known prosperity, the weekly pay envelop, and the buyer's crook of the finger summoning a waiter.

One of the strangers was short, with flaming red hair, and in his eye the twinkle without which the collected works of Bernard Shaw are as sounding brass. He twinkled about him as he walked, at the bright lights and spurious gaiety under the spell of which San Marco sought to forget the rates per day with bath.

"The French," he mused, "are a volatile people, fond of light wines and dancing. So, it would seem, are the inhabitants of San Marco. White flannels, Harry, white flannels! They should incase that leaning tower of Pisa you call your manly form."

The other—long, cadaverous, immersed in gentle melancholy—groaned. "Another tourist hothouse, packed with innocents abroad, and everybody bleeding 'em but us! Everything here but a real home, with chintz table covers and a cold roast of beef in the ice chest. What are we doing here? We should have gone North."

"Ah, Harry, chide me no more," pleaded the little man. "I was weak, I know; but all the freights seemed to be coming South, and I have always longed for a winter amid the sunshine and flowers. Look at this fat old duffer coming! Alms! For the love of Allah, alms!"

"Shut up!" growled the thin one. "Save your breath till we stand hat in hand in the office of the local newspaper. A job! Two jobs! Good Lord! there aren't two newspaper jobs in the entire South. Well, we can only be kicked out into the night again—and perhaps staked to a meal, in the name of the guild in which we have served so long and liquidly."

"Some day," said the short man dreamily, "when I am back in the haunts of civilization again, I am going to start something—a Society for Melting the Stone Hearts of Editors; motto, 'Have a heart—have a heart!' emblem, a roast beef sandwich rampant, on a cloth of linen. Ah, well—the day will come!"

They halted in the Plaza. In the round stone tubs provided the town alligator dozed. Above him hung a warning sign:

Do not feed or otherwise annoy the alligator.

The short man read, and drew back with a tragic groan.

"Feed or otherwise annoy!" he cried. "Heavens, Harry! is that the way they look at it here? This is no place for us. We'd

better be moving on to the next town."

But the lean stranger gave no heed. Instead he stepped over and entered into earnest converse with a citizen of San Marco. In a moment he returned to his companion's side.

"One newspaper," he announced, "The Evening Chronicle." Suppose the office is locked for the night: but come along, let's try."

"Feed or otherwise annoy," muttered the little man blankly. "For the love of Allah—alms!"

THHEY traversed several side streets, and came at last to the office of "The Chronicle." It was a modest structure, verging on decay. One man sat alone in the dim interior, reading exchanges under an electric lamp.

"Good evening," said the short man generally. "Are you the editor?"

"Uh-huh," responded "The Chronicle" man without enthusiasm, from under his green eyeshade.

"Glad to know you. We just dropped in—a couple of newspaper men, you know. This is Mr. Harry Howe, until recently managing editor of 'The Mobile Press.' My own name is Robert O'Neill, a humble editorial writer on the same sheet."

"Uh-huh. If you had jobs, for God's sake why did you leave them?"

"Ah, you may well ask!" The red-haired one dropped uninvited into a chair. "Old man, it's a dramatic story. The Chief of Police of Mobile happened to be a crook and a graftor, and we happened to mention it in 'The Press.' Night before last twenty-five armed cops invaded the peace and sanctity of our sanctum. Harry and I—pure accident—landed in the same general heap at the foot of the fire escape out back. And here we are! Here we are!"

"My newspaper instinct," said "The Chronicle" man, "had already enabled me to gather that last."

Sarcasm! It was a bad sign. But blithely Bob O'Neill continued.

"Here we are," he said, "two experienced newspaper men, down and out. We thought there might possibly be a vacancy or two on the staff of your paper—"

The editor threw off his eyeshade, revealing a cynical face. "Boys," he said, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I've been running this alleged newspaper for two long, dreary years, and this laugh you've just handed me is the first I've had during that time. Vacancies! There is one—a big one. See my pocket for particulars. Two years, Boys. And all the time hoping—praying—that some day I'd make two dollars and sixty cents, which is the railroad fare to the next town."

Howe and O'Neill listened with faces that steadily grew more sorrowful.

"I'd like to stake you to a meal," the editor went on; "but a man's first duty is to his family. Any burglar will tell you that."

"I suppose," ventured O'Neill, most of the flash gone from his manner, "there is no other newspaper here?"

"No, there isn't. There's a weird thing here called 'The San Marco Mail,' a morning outrage. It's making money; but by different methods than I'd care to use. You might try there. You look unlucky. Perhaps they'd take you on."

He rose from his chair, and gave them directions for reaching "The Mail" office.

"Goodnight, Boys," he said. "Thank you for calling. You're the first newspaper men I've seen in two years, except when I've looked in the glass—and the other day I broke my looking glass. Goodnight, and bad luck go with you to the extent of jobs on 'The Mail'!"

CYNIC! breathed O'Neill in the street. A bitter tongue maketh a sour face. I liked him not. A morning outrage called "The Mail"! Sounds promising—like small-pox in the next county."

"We shall see," said Howe, "that which meets our vision. Forward, march!"

"The alligator and I," muttered O'Neill, "famished, perishing. For the love of Allah, as I remarked before, alms!"

In the dark second floor hallway where "The Mail" office was suspected of being they groped about determinedly. No sign of any nature proclaimed San Marco's only morning paper. A solitary light, shining through a transom, beckoned. Boldly O'Neill pushed open the door.

To the knowing nostrils of the two birds of passage was wafted the odor they loved—the unique, inky odor of a newspaper shop. Their eyes beheld a rather bare room, a typewriter or two, a desk. In the center of the room was a small table under an electric lamp. On this table was a bottle and glasses, and at it two silent men played poker. One of the men was burly and bearded; the

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